Urban Aboriginal People in Western Canada:

Realities and Policies

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This report is the first installment of the Canada West Foundation's two-year Urban Aboriginal People Research Initiative, being conducted under the auspices of the larger three-year Western Cities Project. The Initiative will identify key policy areas, explore policy options and alternatives, highlight best practice models, and promote dialogue about urban Aboriginal issues. In so doing, the Canada West Foundation will increase public awareness of those issues and encourage constructive public policy debate.

To meet these objectives, the Urban Aboriginal People Research Initiative will include three components, each to be explored through a public policy lens.

Urban Aboriginal People: Policies and Realities

- Comparison of urban Aboriginal people with non-Aboriginal urban dwellers.
- Overview of current federal, provincial and municipal policies impacting urban Aboriginal people.

Services and Supports for Urban Aboriginal People

- Overview of government and non-profit sector services available to Aboriginal people in six major western Canadian cities.
- Mapping of roles of various levels of government and non-profit sector.
- Evaluation of capacity of western cities to meet the needs of urban Aboriginal people.

Best Practices and Remaining Challenges

- Identification of innovative practices, ideas and programs for urban Aboriginal people.
- Discussion of emerging issues.

The final report, including policy and research recommendations, will be released in December 2002.

This report was prepared by Canada West Foundation Policy Analyst Calvin Hanselmann with the research assistance of Canada West Foundation Intern Carolyn Nyhof.

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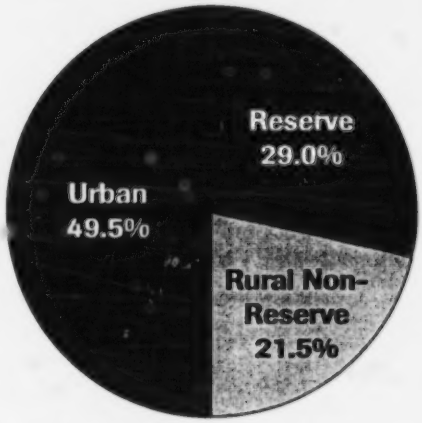
INTRODUCTION

More Aboriginal people live in urban centres in Canada than on reserves, and the urbanization of Aboriginal people is especially apparent in western Canada. Two-thirds of Canada's urban Aboriginal people live in western Canada, and four of the five cities with the highest proportions of Aboriginal people are in the West.

In spite of the size of the urban Aboriginal population, however, public policy discussions about Aboriginal people tend to focus on the reserve-based population. Discussions about treaties, self-government, finances, housing, and other issues focus almost exclusively on First Nation communities and rural areas. This oversight is problematic as it ignores the urban realities of Canada's Aboriginal population. An acute public policy need therefore exists for a broadening of perspectives to include not just on-reserve Aboriginal communities but also urban Aboriginal communities.

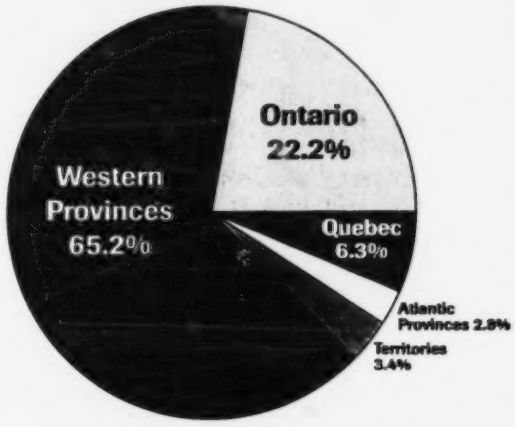
One of the most notable aspects of the urban Aboriginal population is that, compared to the non-Aboriginal population, it is much younger. The fact that the urban Aboriginal population has a younger age structure than the non-Aboriginal population is important for the future of western cities. Skilled labour shortages are currently being experienced in some trades in western cities, and labour supply shortages are projected throughout western Canadian cities in the not too distant future. The urban Aboriginal population offers the promise of a young and growing labour supply that could alleviate some of these shortages.

Figure 1: Geographic Distribution of Canada's Aboriginal Population, 1996 Census



Source: Derived from Statistics Canada (1999)

Figure 2: Geographic Location of Urban Aboriginal Population, 1996 Census



Source: Derived from Statistics Canada (1999)

The rationale for a broader policy debate goes beyond numbers alone. Another reason to focus on urban Aboriginal people revolves around the challenges that might confront cities if public policy-makers overlook this important group. Numerous studies show that the socio-economic conditions of Aboriginal people are different from those of other Canadians and argue that these conditions can be attributed – at least in part – to public policies and societal attitudes. Urban Aboriginal people are consistently concentrated in core areas of Canadian cities and, if policy makers fail to address these conditions, then Aboriginal-non-Aboriginal disparities will continue and may lead to serious inequities within Canadian cities, including the possibility of ghettoization. Given that cities are generally acknowledged as the drivers of, and gateways to, the new economy, it is imperative that any decline in city life be arrested sooner rather than later by addressing urban challenges, including those facing urban Aboriginal people.

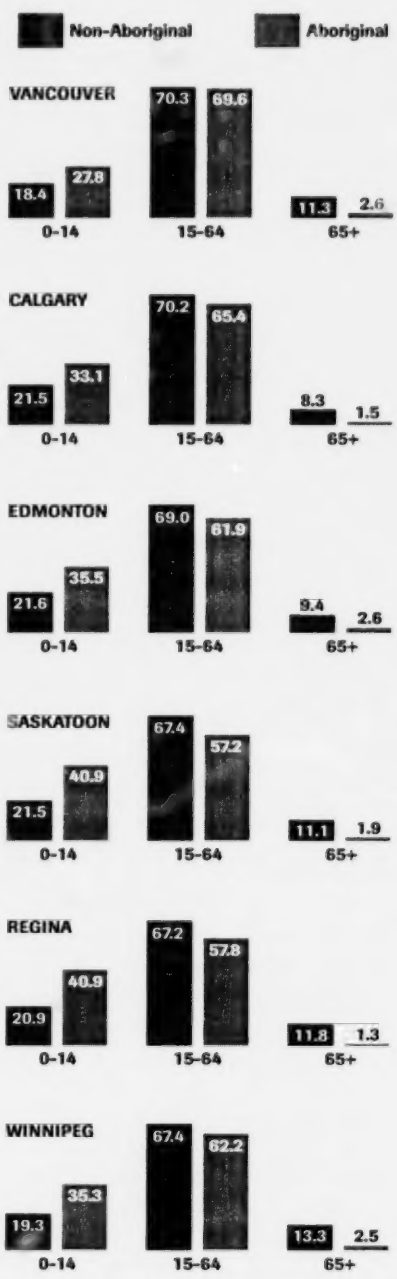
Recognizing the importance of a public policy focus on urban Aboriginal people, this report reviews demographic data and the policy landscape to answer two key questions:

(i) What are the socio-economic conditions of urban Aboriginal people in the six largest cities in western Canada and how do these compare to other urban residents?

(ii) What, if any, differentiated policies have governments created with respect to urban Aboriginal people in these cities?

Based on the analysis, the report offers some

Figure 3: % of Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Population by Age, 1996 Census



Source: Derived from Statistics Canada (1999)

preliminary observations about continuing challenges for governments. Although of particular relevance to western Canada, the realities and policy landscapes facing urban Aboriginal people have repercussions for all Canadian cities with sizable Aboriginal populations, particularly Thunder Bay, Toronto, Ottawa-Hull, and Montreal.

METHODOLOGY

This report examines the realities and policy landscapes for urban Aboriginal people in six major western Canadian cities: Calgary, Edmonton, Regina, Saskatoon, Vancouver, and Winnipeg. The methodology involved a compilation and analysis of socio-economic data; review of existing public policy research studies; primary research of policy documents from the federal, provincial, and municipal governments; telephone interviews with government officials; and verification of the policy findings by each government.

The research focussed on public (government) policy as it relates to the six western cities noted above; policies of nongovernmental organizations are therefore not included in the analysis. The research also did not include the urban policies of Aboriginal governments. Although such policies are important to urban Aboriginal people, and may become significantly more important in the future, they were beyond the scope of this research.

Aboriginal people, it is often said, are the most studied – but least understood – group in Canadian society. Data are often unavailable or of questionable integrity. This is especially true with respect to urban Aboriginal people, as even the most basic piece of demographic data – the number of urban Aboriginal people – is not known with certainty. As a result, "virtually every research document devoted to analyzing and profiling the urban Aboriginal population begins by noting the lack of reliable statistical information" (Kastes, 1993: 63). This report is no exception.

Although Statistics Canada attempts to ensure that the Census covers the population of Canada in as complete a manner as possible, at least two shortcomings are apparent with respect to data on urban Aboriginal people. First, several studies have raised questions about serious undercounting of Aboriginal persons, with the Census population being estimated to undercount Aboriginal persons by between 20 and 40% (Hanselmann, 1997; Lendsay, Painter, and Howe, 1997; Manitoba Centre for Health Policy & Evaluation, 2002).

The second problem with determining an accurate portrait of the urban Aboriginal population is related to the mobility of Aboriginal people. Studies based on Census data show that a significant number of Aboriginal people move from rural and reserve areas to cities, and back and forth. Urban Aboriginal people also often move within and among cities. This mobility makes it difficult to get a firm count of the Aboriginal population of a city. Nevertheless, despite its limitations, the Census remains the most comprehensive source of data on urban Aboriginal people and allows comparisons among the western cities. Aboriginal identity population data from the 1996 Census is therefore the principal source for demographic data in this report.[1]

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URBAN ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN THE WEST: REALITIES AND CHALLENGES

A review of the relevant literature reveals several indicators in which Aboriginal people consistently face challenges in excess of those experienced by the general public. Investigating the reasons for these disparate conditions is beyond the scope of this report; however, several studies, including the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, have argued that past policy decisions by Canadian governments have contributed to, if not created, the conditions faced by many Aboriginal people in such areas as domestic violence, education, employment, income, housing, criminal justice, and health. Negative societal attitudes towards Aboriginal people have also been identified as a significant factor. While the intention of this report is not to attribute blame or responsibility, it is abundantly clear that public policies have particular impact on, and relevancy for, the Aboriginal population. The question here is whether or not the socio-economic conditions of urban Aboriginal people are different from those of non-Aboriginal urbanites in identifiable ways.

Aboriginal families are over twice as likely to be lone parent families, and more likely to experience domestic violence.

A significantly greater share of the urban Aboriginal population is comprised of single parents than is the case with non-Aboriginals. Research indicates that lone parent families are at greater risk of poverty and emotional stress, and less likely to be involved in activities that build social capital. Children of lone parent families are also more likely to be subject to psychiatric disorders, social problems, and academic difficulties. In short, lone parent families require more support than do dual parent families.

Figure 4: Percentage of CMA* Population That Are Lone Parents, 1996 Census

Source: Derived from Statistics Canada (1999)
*CMA=Census Metropolitan Area

Although no national studies exist on family violence in Aboriginal communities, the available evidence suggests that urban Aboriginal people are more likely to experience domestic violence than are non-Aboriginals (Health Canada, 1996; Statistics Canada, 2001; Ursel, 2001). Numerous studies attribute domestic violence among Aboriginal people to socio-historical factors. A higher incidence of domestic violence among urban Aboriginal people has potential impacts for western cities in such areas as increased policing, corrections, health care, and other social costs, as well as having the potential to contribute to family breakdown and a lack of social cohesion within cities.

Figure 5: Educational Attainment, 1996 Census

	VANCOUVER		CALGARY		EDMONTON		SASKATOON		REGINA		WINNIPEG	
	Non-Aboriginal	Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal	Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal	Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal	Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal	Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal	Aboriginal
Less than grade 12	27.6	39.7	26.8	39.6	31.0	49.4	32.1	48.1	32.9	49.4	34.1	54.3
High school diploma	33.3	32.2	31.6	33.1	29.7	27.6	30.6	30.8	33.1	33.0	30.8	26.1
Trades certificate/diploma	2.8	3.1	2.9	2.5	3.4	3.4	2.9	2.5	2.8	2.1	3.2	2.2
Other non-university certificate/diploma	18.7	19.6	20.0	18.8	21.1	18.4	18.4	11.5	18.2	9.8	16.5	13.3
University bachelor's degree or higher	17.6	5.4	18.7	6.0	14.8	3.2	16.1	7.2	14.9	5.8	15.3	4.1

Source: Derived from Statistics Canada (1999)

Aboriginal people are more likely to have lower levels of education.

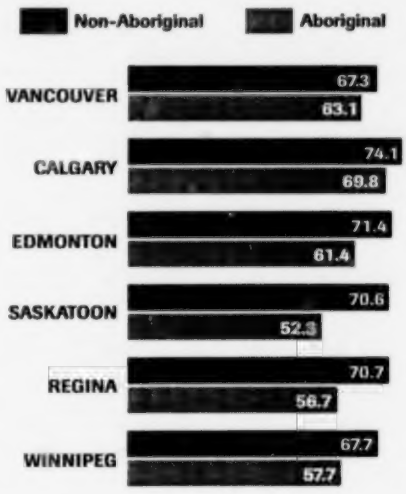
The percentage of the adult urban Aboriginal population with less than grade 12 is consistently higher than that for the non-Aboriginal population, with the most noticeable gap being in Winnipeg, where over one-half of adult Aboriginal people do not have the minimum education for employability. In terms of higher education, urban Aboriginal people are also not as well off as non-Aboriginals. Although these figures are noticeably problematic, educational attainment rates for Aboriginal people, including urban Aboriginal people, have been improving.

Lower educational attainment is of concern for western cities because of the importance of education to success in other aspects of urban life. Adults without a high school diploma are not as employable, have lower incomes, and experience more social problems than those with such education. At the same time, opportunities and income are significantly greater for persons with a university degree.

Aboriginal people typically have lower labour force participation rates and higher unemployment rates.

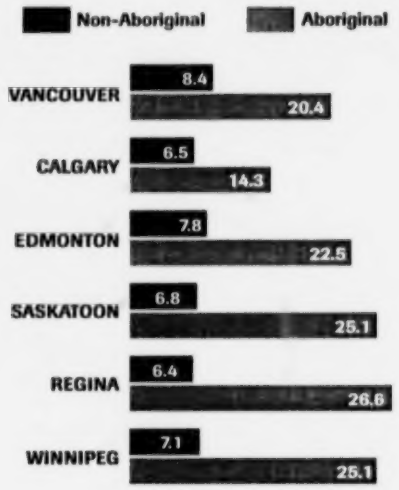
Lower education levels lead to reduced employment opportunities; it is therefore not surprising that the full potential of the urban Aboriginal labour force is not being achieved. In each of the six cities, the Aboriginal labour force participation rate is lower than that for the non-Aboriginal population, while the Aboriginal unemployment rate is consistently at least double that of non-Aboriginals. The greatest disparity is found in Regina, where the Aboriginal unemployment rate is four times that for non-Aboriginals. Again, although the Aboriginal statistics compare poorly with the non-Aboriginal population, these data are an improvement over the past.

Figure 6: Participation Rate, 1996 Census



Source: Derived from Statistics Canada (1999)

Figure 7: Unemployment Rate, 1996 Census

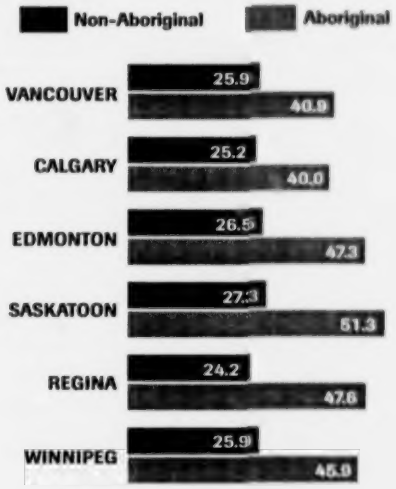


Source: Derived from Statistics Canada (1999)

While the picture is improving, the urban Aboriginal labour force potential remains largely unachieved and this is an important issue for western Canadian cities. As has been mentioned, future labour supply shortages could be relieved in part through the younger, growing urban Aboriginal population. An improved employment picture among urban Aboriginal people will have positive impacts on municipal, provincial, and federal governments through reduced social spending and increased tax bases.[2] For urban Aboriginal people, improvements in labour force measures will result in increased personal and family incomes and well-being.

Aboriginal people frequently have lower income levels. Given lower educational levels and lower employment prospects, it should be no surprise that urban Aboriginal people have lower incomes than non-Aboriginals. What may be surprising are the magnitude of poverty and degree of disparity. If measured in absolute terms, a person is living in poverty if he or she "lack[s] the means to buy a specified basket of goods and services designated as essential" (Fellegi, 1997). By this measure, most would agree that an adult in a major urban centre with an annual income of less than $10,000 is living in poverty; the preliminary Market Basket Measure of poverty supports this assertion (HRDC, 1998a). By this measure, many urban Aboriginal people in the six western cities live in poverty, although the picture is improving.

Figure 8: Percentage of the Population 15 Years and Over With Total 1995 Income Below $10,000, 1996 Census



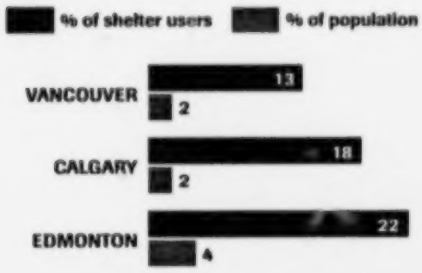
Source: Derived from Statistics Canada (1999)

Low incomes result in lower standards of living, increased risk of family and social problems, and increased risk of homelessness. For governments concerned about western cities, the low incomes of urban Aboriginal people mean increased social spending and foregone tax revenues.

Aboriginal people tend to have higher rates of homelessness and greater housing needs.

Although homelessness data are not consistently available, research in Vancouver, Calgary, and Edmonton finds Aboriginal people strongly over-represented among homeless populations. Given the many socio-economic similarities among the Aboriginal populations of the cities, it seems fair to assume that the same over-representation would be found in Saskatoon, Regina, and Winnipeg; this suggestion is supported by data from a study of urban First Nations homelessness in Saskatchewan (SIIT, 2000). Housing needs among urban Aboriginal people are also pronounced. Research based on the 1996 Census strongly suggests that urban Aboriginal people are more likely than non-Aboriginals to be in need of housing (CMHC, 2001).

Figure 9: Aboriginal Homelessness, Selected Western Cities



Sources: BC, 2001b; Calgary, 2000a; Edmonton Homelessness Count Committee, 2000

Homelessness is symptomatic of larger problems such as substance abuse, mental health issues, family breakdown, underemployment, low income, and racism; many of these conditions also contribute to housing need. In turn, insufficient or inadequate housing contributes to further urban challenges such as crime, low social cohesion, and inadequate quality of life. Homelessness and housing need affect children and youth in their ability to perform in school, to engage in their communities, and to achieve success throughout their lives.

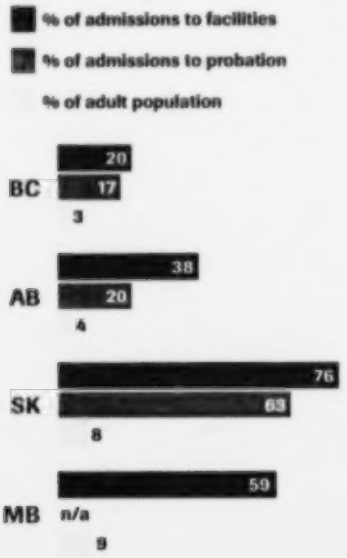
Aboriginal people are over-represented in the criminal justice system, both as victims and as offenders.

No data are available that allow direct comparisons between urban Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people with respect to criminal justice issues (Solicitor-General, 1998); however, it is known that Aboriginal people generally are involved in criminal justice matters at a greater rate than non-Aboriginals (Statistics Canada, 2001). First, Aboriginal people experience higher rates of criminal victimization than do non-Aboriginals. Whereas 26% of non-Aboriginals reported having been the victim of at least one crime in a 1999 survey, among Aboriginal persons the rate was 35% (Statistics Canada, 2001). In terms of violent crime, the victimization rate among Aboriginal people "was nearly three times greater than that of non-Aboriginal people" while the spousal abuse victimization rate was almost three times higher for Aboriginal people than for non-Aboriginals (Statistics Canada, 2001).

Second, Aboriginal people are over-represented among offenders, accounting for far greater shares of correctional admissions than their population would indicate. In each of the four western provinces, the percentages of admissions to both adult provincial correctional facilities and probation far exceed the Aboriginal share of the provincial population. The most extreme case is Saskatchewan, where Aboriginal

people account for 8% of the adult population but three-quarters of admissions to facilities and two-thirds of admissions to probation.[3] In addition, Aboriginal people are over-represented among federal admissions; a recent count by the Correctional Service of Canada's Prairie Region showed 37% of federal offenders were Aboriginal persons in a region in which 8% of the population is Aboriginal (Braun, 2001).

Figure 10: Aboriginal Admissions to Adult Provincial Facilities and Probation, 1998/99



Source: Statistics Canada (2001); derived from Statistics Canada (1999)

These data do not provide an explanation for Aboriginal over-representation in the criminal justice system. Nonetheless, over-representation among both victims and offenders is relevant to western cities for several reasons. First, increased victimization and criminalization both impact negatively on Aboriginal people as individuals, family members, and members of the community. Second, the potential benefits of Aboriginal labour force participation to both urban Aboriginal people and western cities are considerably diminished if Aboriginal people are experiencing crime as either victims or offenders. Another area of importance for western cities is that statistics such as these contribute to real and perceived concerns about the level of safety in communities.

Aboriginal people generally have poorer health status. Research shows that average life expectancy is five or more years less, and mortality rates are higher, for Aboriginal people than for other Canadians (CIHI, 2000; Statistics Canada, 1998; Statistics Canada, 2000b). The reasons for reduced life expectancy and higher mortality rates are many and varied. One contributor is increased suicide rates as "Aboriginal status is associated with a 150% increase in risk of suicide" (CIHI, 1999: 304). Other reasons include significantly higher incidences of disease. First, urban Aboriginal people are at higher risk for contracting tuberculosis (Long, 2000). Second, the prevalence of diabetes among Aboriginals is at least three times that of the general population (Health Canada, 1999). Third, HIV and AIDS data also show over-representation among Aboriginal people and a likelihood that urban Aboriginal people are particularly at risk (Health Canada, 2000). A final factor is participation in high-risk activities. For example, the 1997 smoking rate among adults in the Aboriginal population was double the rate for Canada as a whole (Statistics Canada, 2000b). More generally:

> Indigenous Canadians are at particular risk of substance abuse. The majority of Aboriginal Canadians smoke, youth are at two to six

times greater risk for alcohol problems than other Canadians, and Indigenous Canadians have relatively high rates of illicit drug use (Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, 1999).

These data strongly suggest that urban Aboriginal people have health care needs in excess of those of the general population. This will put increasing pressure on the health care system as the urban Aboriginal population increases in absolute and relative terms, and as the Aboriginal baby boom ages.

Summary

Taken together, the data demonstrate that in a number of key policy areas, important distinctions exist between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations of the six major western cities under consideration.

Although educational attainment, labour force participation, and personal incomes are improving, the socio-economic conditions of many urban Aboriginal people continue to be worse than those of non-Aboriginal urban dwellers. In short, urban Aboriginal people are distinguishable from non-Aboriginal urban dwellers.

These disparities are not unrelated to public policy. For example, the most exhaustive study of Aboriginal people in Canada, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, concluded that the underlying causes of many of the disparate conditions faced by Aboriginal people could be traced back to government policies. Examples of negative policy consequences are many, including the on-going effects of the government-imposed residential schools policy – which removed children from their families, limited their exposure to Aboriginal role models, attempted forced assimilation, and subjected many to physical, emotional, and sexual abuse – being witnessed in high rates of suicide, substance abuse, family breakdown, domestic violence, and criminalization today. The question to be addressed here is whether or not the contemporary policy environment is being crafted so as to explicitly recognize the distinctive characteristics of the urban Aboriginal population.

URBAN ABORIGINAL POLICY IN WESTERN CITIES

Canadian governments have historically been hesitant to create policies specific to urban Aboriginal people. Much of this hesitancy is related to disagreements over the unclear and controversial question of legislative authority, and therefore responsibility, for urban Aboriginal people.

Whereas the Constitution clearly accords exclusive legislative authority for "Indians, and Lands reserved for Indians" to the federal Parliament (*Constitution Act, 1867*, s. 91(24)), authority and responsibility for other Aboriginal people is subject to disagreement. Following from its constitutional authority, the federal government's principal legislative action in the field of Aboriginal issues has been the *Indian Act*, which applies to registered or status Indians as defined by the Act. At the same time, the federal government's position has been that the provinces bear primary but not exclusive responsibility for other Aboriginal people.[4] As a result, the federal government has traditionally focussed its attention towards on-reserve status Indians and, in a policy sense, has largely

ignored Aboriginal people living off reserves, including urban Aboriginal people.

The provinces, however, have historically responded that *all* Aboriginal people are the primary responsibility of the federal government and that provincial duties are limited to serving Aboriginal people as part of the larger provincial population (RCAP, 1996). Provincial governments have therefore been hesitant to take any policy actions targeted towards urban Aboriginal people.

The lack of agreement over responsibility has been identified as leading to "inconclusive activity" (Breton and Grant, 1984: xxx) and a "policy vacuum" (RCAP, 1996: 542). Where policies do exist, they "have evolved ad hoc" and are often seen as inadequate (RCAP, 1996: 544). In the absence of federal or provincial action, municipalities have often been left to create policies to provide for the needs of urban Aboriginal people – and frequently lacked capacity to do so adequately.

The outcome of this policy void has been that urban Aboriginal people have largely fallen through the cracks. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples stated that "[m]any called this the most critical issue facing urban Aboriginal people" (RCAP, 1996: 538). Although in theory policies applicable to the general population include urban Aboriginal people, the Royal Commission identified three facets to the issue:

> First, urban Aboriginal people do not receive the same level of services and benefits that First Nations people living on-reserve or Inuit living in their communities obtain from the federal government.... Second, urban Aboriginal people often have difficulty gaining access to provincial programs available to other residents.... Third, ... they would like access to culturally appropriate programs that would meet their needs more effectively. (RCAP, 1996: 538)

Although the Royal Commission included recommendations meant to close the policy gaps with respect to urban Aboriginal people, little concrete government action has been witnessed. It is clear that neither federal nor provincial governments have been willing to take primary responsibility for urban Aboriginal people. Frequently exasperating matters has been a lack of policy capacity on the part of municipal governments. The question, then, is how governments are currently responding to the challenges facing urban Aboriginal people.

Defining Urban Aboriginal Policy

At its most basic level, public policy acts as a guide for governments. When a policy is in place, it provides guidance to public servants in performing their duties; it also delineates the extent to which public servants have discretion in an area. In at least two ways, public policy is also a statement of responsibility on the part of a government. First, a public policy signals that a government recognizes both the importance of an issue and the government's responsibility to address the situation. Second, public policies help to maintain lines of responsibility as elected officials make policy decisions, and are responsible to the public for these decisions. Public policies are therefore fundamental to the connection between government and the public.

Public policies vary in terms of both formality and

scope. At one level, policies set out formal frameworks within which more specific decisions are made. These "government-wide" policies are usually of broad scope, outlining in general terms a philosophy or relationship. In the context of this report, a government-wide urban Aboriginal policy would be an overarching public written statement that sets out a government's approach to urban Aboriginal people.

Although in a perfect world government-wide policies would be replicated within each department, the reality is that individual departments often create their own "department-specific" policies. In the context of this report, a department-specific urban Aboriginal policy would be a public statement that describes a departmental strategy for urban Aboriginal people, one that goes beyond enumerating a list of programs or services.

At another level, a government's approach to an issue is reflected in programs and service delivery. While programs often implement broader policy frameworks, they may also be one-off or ad hoc in origin and design. It is therefore imperative not to confuse a program as being a policy. As a result, this report will refrain from discussing programs; an overview and analysis of programs and services available to urban Aboriginal people will be the subject of a forthcoming Canada West Foundation study.

Through a review of publicly available primary source material, Canada West identified government-wide and department-specific urban Aboriginal policies across 17 policy fields.[5] For the purposes of this report, an urban Aboriginal policy is an explicit public expression of a governmental or departmental approach to addressing issues confronting urban Aboriginal people. The document must:

> (i) specifically mention Aboriginal people in urban settings; or,
> (ii) be Aboriginal-specific and include an urban component; or,
> (iii) be urban-specific and include an Aboriginal component.

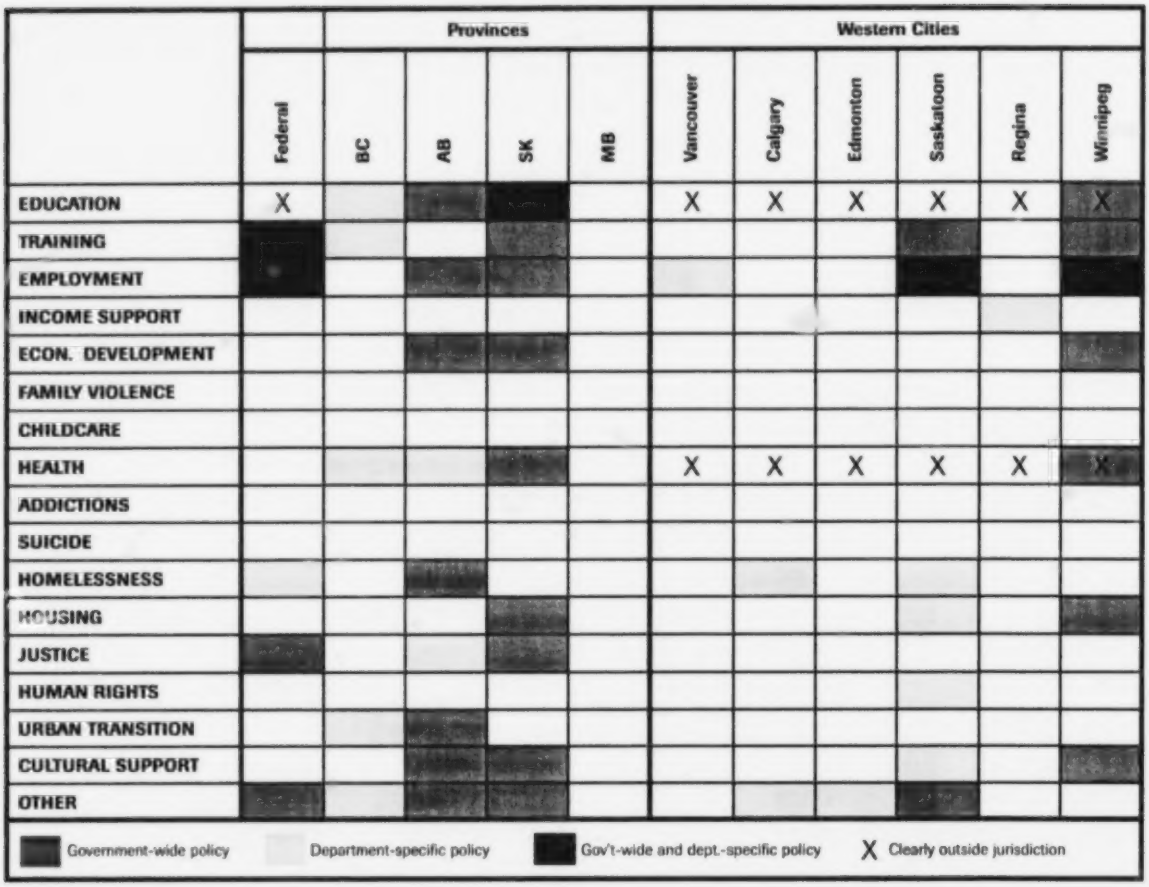
By this definition, a government policy statement that targets off-reserve Aboriginal people does not necessarily constitute a policy for urban Aboriginal people.

Figure 11 on the following page presents an overview of urban Aboriginal policy for western Canada. Readers are reminded that an empty cell in the figure does not necessarily imply that a government has no policy in a particular field, but rather that the government in question has no *urban Aboriginal-specific* policy in that area. For example, the federal government has income support policies that apply to all Canadians; indeed, the government also has a policy specific to treaty First Nations. However, as the federal government does not have an income support policy that is specific to urban Aboriginal people, that cell is empty. Also, readers should be clear that a lack of *policy* in a given field does not necessarily indicate an absence of government *activity* in that field; governments may offer programs without operating within a policy framework.

Federal Urban Aboriginal Policies

As previously noted, the federal government has historically taken the position that its specific responsibilities for Aboriginal peoples are limited to

Figure 11: Urban Aboriginal Policy Landscape



status Indians living on-reserve and the Inuit; other Aboriginal people, including urban Aboriginal people, are primarily held as being the responsibility of provincial governments. Although this position has softened somewhat of late, the federal government remains unwilling to take primary responsibility for Aboriginal people living off-reserve, including urban Aboriginal people.

In early 1998 the federal government responded to the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples through *Gathering Strength – Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan*. Within the larger policy statement, the needs of urban Aboriginal people, and the government's response, were given specific mention. In this way, the federal government was signalling that it has a government-wide policy in place for responding to the "serious socio-economic conditions" facing many urban Aboriginal people (Canada, 1998).

Indeed, the existence of an Urban Aboriginal Strategy

has been publicly acknowledged (Caron, 1999) even though no official announcement of the specifics of the policy framework has occurred. Nonetheless, as shown in Figure 11, it has been stated that the Urban Aboriginal Strategy "includes several federal initiatives for employment and training, youth and justice" (Caron, 1999). Further evidence of the existence of a government-wide policy with respect to urban Aboriginal people is found in a 1999 Memorandum of Understanding among Canada, Manitoba, and Winnipeg establishing an Urban Aboriginal Strategy for that city. An additional signal that the federal government is examining more seriously the issue of urban Aboriginal people is the announcement in May 2001 of a Prime Minister's Caucus Task Force on Urban Issues, in which urban Aboriginal people will receive special emphasis.

Although several departments have programs that specifically target urban Aboriginal people, only two department-specific policies were identified by the research. First, the *Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy* of Human Resources Development Canada is a five-year, $1.6 billion policy and funding commitment, of which $150 million is allocated to an urban component (HRDC, 1999). Second, the federal *Homeless Initiative* is an inter-departmental policy that commits $59 million to projects for homeless Aboriginal people.

Provincial Urban Aboriginal Policies

A consistent historical theme among provincial governments has been that the provinces believe they have no special, constitutionally mandated responsibility for Aboriginal people, and that the federal government is not fulfilling its responsibilities in this respect. As a consequence, the provinces have tended to avoid urban Aboriginal policies. More recently, however, specific urban Aboriginal policies have emerged in some provinces.

British Columbia

Although the Province of British Columbia does not have a government-wide urban Aboriginal policy, department-specific policies exist in the fields of education, training, health, urban transition, and municipal affairs ("other" in Figure 11). In the education and training fields, the Ministry of Advanced Education's *Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework* sets guideposts for several programming initiatives intended to improve Aboriginal post-secondary success rates and provides pre-employment training opportunities for Aboriginal learners. The policy includes an urban Aboriginal component as several Vancouver-based post-secondary institutions are included.

An Aboriginal-specific policy with an urban component was identified in the Health department's *The Red Road: Pathways to Wholeness*, a strategy for reducing the incidence of HIV and AIDS among Aboriginal people in British Columbia. Department-specific policy is also found in the area of urban transition: the First Citizens' Fund mandates support for Friendship Centres, which "deliver a range of social and recreational programming to Aboriginals living in urban areas" (British Columbia, 2001c). Finally, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs has a policy to "facilitate and support the building of harmonious and productive relationships between local governments and First Nations" (British Columbia, 2001a).

Alberta

The Province of Alberta's Aboriginal government-wide policy framework, *Strengthening Relationships*, states that the government will "develop partnerships ... to develop strategies for addressing the needs of Aboriginal people ... including strategies to address the needs of Aboriginal persons living in urban areas" (Alberta, 2000: 10). *Strengthening Relationships* mentions several fields in which the government will undertake policy initiatives, including education, economic development, employment, homelessness, urban transition, cultural support, youth ("other"), and individual self-reliance. In addition, the policy statement speaks to development of an Aboriginal policy checklist "for ongoing review of existing and future policies, programs and services to see if they address the needs, legal requirements and agreements with First Nation, Métis and other Aboriginal communities and organizations" (Alberta, 2000: 19).

Figure 11 also identifies department-specific policy statements in the fields of justice, where Alberta Justice has a policy to work with other stakeholders to "deal with urban Aboriginal issues" (Alberta, 2001), and in health, where the Aboriginal Health Strategy includes several initiatives specific to urban Aboriginal people.

Saskatchewan

The Province of Saskatchewan has a government-wide policy statement that covers urban Aboriginal people. *A Framework for Cooperation* was released in January 1999 as a discussion paper that set out the government's vision, principles, and key goals with respect to off-reserve First Nations and Métis people in the province. Following discussions with Aboriginal organizations and others, *A Framework for Cooperation: Policy Statement* was drafted in January 2001 and released in May 2001. The goal-oriented Framework is "the province's strategy to address the needs and priorities of Saskatchewan's Métis and off-reserve First Nations people" and explicitly speaks to working with municipal governments. The Framework's intent is to guide future initiatives in four policy fields: education and training, workforce development, employment and economic development, and individual and community well-being. This last field includes social services; cultural, sport and recreational activities; health; criminal justice and crime prevention; and housing. In addition, a departmental policy statement was identified in Saskatchewan Education's encouragement of the Community Schools model for Aboriginal communities, including urban Aboriginal communities.

Manitoba

According to an official with the Government of Manitoba, the Province does not currently have an urban Aboriginal policy. The previous Government had a draft comprehensive policy statement, entitled the *Urban Aboriginal Strategy*, and was working on implementation when control of the legislature changed hands. This document is no longer considered government policy and nothing has replaced it. Nonetheless, the Province of Manitoba has tripartite agreements with the federal government and each of the Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg and the Manitoba Métis Federation, although no policy directives framing these agreements could be identified. In addition, no department-specific policies were located. As a result, Figure 11 shows a column of empty cells for Manitoba. This situation,

however, may soon change. The Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission "was created to develop an action plan based on the original Aboriginal Justice Inquiry recommendations" (AJIC, 2000). The Commission has presented recommendations applicable to the fields of family, employment, and justice. According to a Manitoba government official, the Commission's work "points to where the Province may be going" in these areas.

Summary

Given the earlier reluctance of provinces to become involved in urban Aboriginal issues, the provincial policy landscape is more robust than expected. Government-wide policy statements exist in Alberta and Saskatchewan while departmental policies were identified in several fields in British Columbia and Alberta, and in one field in Saskatchewan.

Municipal Urban Aboriginal Policies

Municipal governments in western Canada have jurisdiction only in those areas delegated to them by their respective provincial governments, although the delegation can be very broad in scope. As such, the policy fields in which municipalities may have urban Aboriginal policies are at the same time constrained and expansive. Municipalities are constrained by the powers ascribed to them by provincial legislatures and by the fact that other local government authorities are also created, and authorized to act in certain areas, by the provincial government. For example, school boards are empowered to create and administer education policy in local areas; municipal governments generally may not act in this field.

At the same time, the policy fields available to municipalities may seem almost unlimited. This is because, without action by more senior levels of government, it often falls upon municipal government to alleviate problems. Municipal actions, however, frequently occur in the absence of a policy framework and often take the form of ad hoc programs and services.

Vancouver

The City of Vancouver has no government-wide policy with respect to Aboriginal residents; its only department-specific policy directive is the City's Equal Employment Opportunity policy, which includes Aboriginal people as a target group.

Calgary

The City of Calgary does not have a government-wide urban Aboriginal policy. However, the City does have two department-specific policies. In the field of homelessness, the Community Action Plan (part of the City's Homelessness Initiative) includes several actions targeted specifically at the Aboriginal population. In the field of family and community support ("other" in Figure 11), the criteria for the joint provincial-municipal Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) program includes a statement that "Aboriginal communities [will] receive special consideration" (Calgary, 2001).

It should be noted that in 1979, City Council established the Native Urban Affairs Committee (now the Calgary Aboriginal Urban Affairs Committee) and authorized it "to investigate areas of concern to people of Aboriginal ancestry and to make recommendations on policies and resolutions which would give urban Aboriginal people a more meaningful role within the

Calgary community" (Calgary, 2000b). However, no discernable policy statements have yet emerged.

Edmonton

The City of Edmonton does not have a government-wide urban Aboriginal policy and, as Figure 11 illustrates, the directive for the FCSS program (noted above) is the only department-specific policy for the City. Although an Edmonton Aboriginal Urban Affairs Committee exists, no policy initiatives were identified. An official with the Committee indicates that some work is ongoing in the fields of homelessness and housing.

Saskatoon

One of the "Core Strategies" of the City of Saskatoon's *Strategic Plan* is to "strengthen relationships with Aboriginal communities" (Saskatoon, 2000: 9). The *Strategic Plan* is the City's basic guide for setting corporate direction. The *Corporate Business Plan* builds on the *Strategic Plan* and is used by departments "to develop specific actions which they undertake throughout the course of the business plan's timeframe" (Saskatoon, 2000: 2). The current *Business Plan*, in effect to 2002, states that initiatives in support of the Aboriginal partnerships strategy are in the areas of planning, decision-making, employment, and training. The City of Saskatoon therefore has a government-wide policy for urban Aboriginal people.

The framework statements are supplemented by several initiatives that qualify as department-specific urban Aboriginal policies. The City's employment equity policy includes Aboriginal people among the target groups while the Saskatoon Community Plan for Homelessness and Housing, approved in May 2001, includes specific initiatives for Aboriginal people. In terms of human rights, an Equity and Race Relations Committee was established by City Council in 1989, the position of Race Relations Program Coordinator was created in 1991, and City Council adopted an Equity and Race Relations Policy in 1997. Cultural support is provided through the Community Services Department's Aboriginal Program Plan.

In addition, and as part of the Development Plan, the City's policy with respect to working with First Nations in the region is that the City "supports the establishment of First Nations Reserve Lands within and near the City Limits, subject to appropriate agreements regarding matters such as: (i) Compensation for loss of municipal taxation; (ii) Payment for municipal services; and (iii) Bylaw compatibility and compatibility of enforcement" (Saskatoon, 2000: 81).

Regina

The City of Regina does not have a government-wide policy with respect to urban Aboriginal people, although it does have department-specific policy in the field of income support. Within the City's Social Development Grants Program is a policy that "a target of at least 25 percent of the Social Development Grants Program budget is directed to organizations providing services to the Aboriginal community [and that] ... poverty reduction initiatives that focus upon Aboriginal people ... are favoured" (Regina, 2001: 4).

Winnipeg

The City of Winnipeg's *Plan Winnipeg...Toward 2010* is a comprehensive framework to guide City decisions, policies, and programs. Specific policy statements for

Aboriginal people are included in the fields of education, training, employment, economic development, housing, and cultural support. In education, training, and economic development, the policy framework commits the City to encouraging Aboriginal people to "be partners in, contributors to, and beneficiaries of Winnipeg's economic development initiatives and associated education, training, and employment programs" (Winnipeg, 1993). The Plan also includes commitments to encourage employment of Aboriginal people, to work with the Aboriginal community in the area of housing, and to assist the Aboriginal community "by establishing a positive and cooperative relationship in support of that community's initiatives to address and fulfill its needs." As a result, Figure 11 indicates that government-wide Aboriginal policies are in the fields of education, training, employment, economic development, housing, and cultural support.

A second government-wide policy statement is the Council decision in 2000 to endorse the Maskwachees Declaration, which states: "Sustainable commitment and investment in active living, physical activity, physical education, recreation and sport, are essential to promote health and address social issues facing Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples in communities across Canada" (Winnipeg, 2000: 7). This policy appears in Figure 11 in the form of government-wide policies in the health and cultural support policy fields.

The government-wide policies are complemented by department-specific policy in the City's employment equity policy, which includes Aboriginal people as a designated group. In addition, the City has an Advisory Committee on Aboriginal Affairs to provide advice, guidance and support to City Council, although no policy directives from the Committee were identified.

Summary

Overall, considerable variation exists in the number and scope of policies at the municipal level. Winnipeg and Saskatoon stand out as having the broadest policy coverage while Vancouver and Regina have almost no policies specific to urban Aboriginal people.

It must be reiterated that the relative paucity of formal policy statements with respect to urban Aboriginal people should not necessarily be seen as a lack of engagement by federal, provincial, or municipal governments in western Canada's major cities. The absence of formal policy need not preclude extensive program activity, nor is it necessarily an indication of neglect.

PUTTING IT TOGETHER: URBAN ABORIGINAL POLICY IN EACH CITY

Looking at the policies together (see Figure 12 on the following page), a number of conclusions can be drawn. First, Figure 12 clearly shows that, at least to some extent, governments are responding to the challenges facing urban Aboriginal people with a *differentiated policy environment.* Although governments are not responding in a consistent fashion across the cities, most jurisdictions have implemented policies that are specific to urban Aboriginal people. The urban Aboriginal-specific policy landscape ranges from comprehensive

Figure 12: Comparative Policy Landscape

	Vancouver	Calgary	Edmonton	Saskatoon	Regina	Winnipeg
EDUCATION	P	P	P	P	P	M
TRAINING	F P	F	F	F P M	F P	F M
EMPLOYMENT	F M	F P	F P	F P M	F P	F M
INCOME SUPPORT					M	
ECON. DEVELOPMENT		P	P	P	P	M
FAMILY VIOLENCE						
CHILDCARE						
HEALTH	P	P	P	P	P	M
ADDICTIONS						
SUICIDE						
HOMELESSNESS	F	F P M	F P	F M	F	F
HOUSING				P M	P	M
JUSTICE	F	F P	F P	F P	F P	F
HUMAN RIGHTS				M		
URBAN TRANSITION	P	P	P			
CULTURAL SUPPORT		P	P	P M	P	M
OTHER	F P	F P M	F P M	F P M	F P	F

Urban Aboriginal policy **F** Federal policy **P** Provincial policy **M** Municipal policy

government-wide frameworks to departmental initiatives to the absence of differentiated policy. In short, the urban Aboriginal domain has been the site of significant policy development.

Second, Figure 12 identifies the policy fields in which gaps exist in explicit urban Aboriginal-specific policy. None of the governments have policies in the areas of family violence, childcare, addictions, or suicide; only the City of Saskatoon has an urban Aboriginal-specific human rights policy; and only the City of Regina has a policy specifically targeting income support to urban Aboriginal people. Other fields in which large gaps appear in the policy landscape are housing and urban transition.

Third, even in the case of government-wide policy frameworks, the differentiated policy landscape does not have a very firm connection to the realities of urban Aboriginal people. Differentiated policies do not appear in many of the fields in which urban Aboriginal people are shown by the demographic data to be facing particularly acute challenges.

Fourth, Figure 12 also shows fields having policy overlap among the levels of government. These policies may be complementary or they may be duplicative; it is beyond the scope of this report to conduct the assessment necessary to determine this. However, the existence of multiple levels of policy can be seen as an indication of the relative importance placed on certain policy fields by federal, provincial, and municipal governments. The fields of training and employment, for example, feature layers of policy in every city – a clear signal that governments recognize the importance of bridging the gaps in labour force participation and unemployment rates seen earlier in this report.

Finally, it bears repeating that governments without differentiated policies in all or any of the fields in Figure 12 may be addressing these areas either through policies that apply to the general population or through urban Aboriginal-specific programs in the absence of policies.

CONCLUSION

The socio-economic data and policy overview allow answers to three key questions:

What are the socio-economic conditions of urban Aboriginal people in the six largest cities in western Canada and how do these compare to other urban residents?

The socio-economic comparison of urban Aboriginal people to the non-Aboriginal population in six large cities in western Canada shows that, on a number of important indicators of personal and community well-being, many urban Aboriginal people live in disparate conditions. In short, many urban Aboriginal people face challenges well in excess of those faced by the general population.

What, if any, differentiated policies have governments created with respect to urban Aboriginal people in these cities?

Although no level of government in western Canada is at present willing to assume sole responsibility for urban Aboriginal people, for the most part governments have crafted policies that specifically target urban Aboriginal people. The confusion and contradictions surrounding responsibility for creating policies have not precluded substantial policy activity: federal, provincial, and municipal governments all have urban Aboriginal-specific policies.

What challenges continue to confront governments?

The differentiated policy landscape with respect to urban Aboriginal people is neither comprehensive nor coherent. The fact that no one level of government has taken primary responsibility for urban Aboriginal people has resulted in gaps in the policy landscape. At the same time, and perhaps as a result of unclear responsibilities, a lack of coordination and cooperation among governments has led to policy overlaps in some fields and further gaps in others.

The first challenge continuing to confront governments is therefore the question of responsibility for creating policies that are specific to urban Aboriginal people. Related to this is a need for

intergovernmental coordination and cooperation in implementing policies. Unless and until governments can either settle or set aside the issue of responsibility, policies with respect to urban Aboriginal people will continue to be characterized by inconsistencies, overlaps, and gaps.

The second challenge is the need for Aboriginal involvement in crafting policies for urban Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people have a special status recognized in law, and therefore must be active participants in any discussions of responsibility. Admittedly, this is complicated; whereas land-based Aboriginal governments have become players on the policy field, urban Aboriginal people may not have the capacity to do so as they lack a land base and have little organizational cohesion – there really is no such thing as an urban Aboriginal *community*. Nevertheless, ways must be found to engage Aboriginal people in policy-making that affects urban Aboriginal people.

Flowing from the first and second challenges is the need for dialogue, both among governments and between governments and Aboriginal people.

Questions Remaining Unanswered

With urban Aboriginal people being distinguishable from other urban dwellers on a number of measures, a natural question is whether or not they could be a constituency served by Aboriginal governments. Indeed, although not examined in this report, some Aboriginal governments are fairly active in crafting policies to serve urban Aboriginal people. Considering that the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples suggested a model of self-government that would be applicable to urban Aboriginal people – the Aboriginal community of interest model of government – the question of roles for Aboriginal governments will take on greater importance in the future.

Related to this is the question of responsibility for creating policies that are specific to urban Aboriginal people. Should exclusive responsibility for urban Aboriginal people be assumed by one level of government? If so, which level of government should develop policies for a specific sub-population, one that is part of a larger *Aboriginal* community and also part of a larger *urban* community? Who has the necessary levers and policy tools to respond to the needs of urban Aboriginal people? At the crux of the issue is, who pays?

A third question is whether or not differentiated policy is desirable. Is there a *need* for policy differentiation? That is, are the conditions facing urban Aboriginal people so different from those of other *urban* people and/or other *Aboriginal* people to require policy responses that are different than those addressed to the needs of those larger populations? Is there a *right* or *entitlement* to policy differentiation? Is policy differentiation good policy? In other words, should the needs, rights, entitlements, and aspirations of urban Aboriginal people be addressed through universalistic policies, or does a policy approach that singles out urban Aboriginal people for differentiated treatment make good policy sense? Finally, even if universalistic policies are appropriate, is culturally-sensitive service delivery still essential?

Another question left unanswered by this report is the importance of explicit public policy statements. Earlier in this report, a description of policy argued for

their importance. However, improvements in some indicators of well-being have been witnessed in the absence of formal policy environments. This suggests that progress can occur without explicit policy. On the other hand, the progress to-date is insufficient and inadequate, both in areas in which policies exist and in the absence of policies. To provide a complete answer to this question therefore requires going beyond policies to an examination of the programs and services governments provide for urban Aboriginal people. This will be the focus of the second report of Canada West's Urban Aboriginal People Research Initiative. ■

ENDNOTES

1. The Aboriginal identity population is comprised of those persons who identified with one or more Aboriginal groups (North American Indian, Métis, or Inuit), and those who did not identify with an Aboriginal group but who reported that they were Registered/Treaty Indians or Band/First Nation members (Statistics Canada, 1999a: 5-8).

2. A common misconception among Canadians is that Aboriginal people do not pay taxes. In most instances, this is *not* the case. The exemptions from taxation under the *Indian Act* apply only to Registered Indians and then only to reserve lands and personal property (including income); these provisions do not apply to non-Status Indians, Inuit, or Métis. Registered Indians are also exempt from paying federal or provincial sales taxes on personal and real property on a reserve.

3. As well, a recent Statistics Canada study found the 7% of Regina's population who were Aboriginal accounted for 49% of persons accused of an offence, while in Saskatoon, Aboriginal people comprised 8% of the population and 47% of accused persons (Statistics Canada, 2000a).

4. Judicial interpretation has broadened federal responsibility to include the Inuit, without any resultant federal legislation.

5. The importance of determining whether or not urban Aboriginal-specific policies exist in these particular fields is amplified by the fact that these are repeatedly identified as priority areas by and for urban Aboriginal people (Calgary, 2000c; Vancouver Open Space, 2000; Thompson and Hylton, 1999; Auger, Blyan, Pommen, 1999; HRDC, 1998b).

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